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Destination: Guerdon



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Chapter 1 by Sofi Hjalmarsson

"There's no way you can miss it. It's the only building out that way and it's fucking huge."

And yet, Marion was beginning to think she'd done just that. She was racing down the once splendid highway and all she could see was dust, dried vegetation and the horizon. That was all there was past the Ouache city borders, past the walls and the viaducts and the crammed streets. It was a wonder the city of Ouache itself hadn't dried up.

A jet bike boomed past her. All it left behind was a surge of air and dust and an overwhelming sense of inadequacy with her own bike. She wouldn't be able to afford one of those even if she picked up a third job, not even if all her courier assignments paid like this one did. She'd picked it up by chance, or luck perhaps.

Sammy, her boss at the agency, had called her in to his office, something that was quite unusual. She normally picked up her assignments from the notice board outside. Convinced she'd screwed up somehow, she'd gone in prepared for the worst. She found Sammy pacing back and forth behind his desk, his one clawed hand, that had given him the nickname 'Sammy the Crab', furiously scratching at his balding scalp.

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"A complaint?" Marion figured that was the best she could hope for.

"What? No no... No, this is a very important piece of paper, or rather the package it came with is very important." He rested a pair of gold framed glasses on his nose and read:

"Urgent delivery required.

Goods: Classified

Destination: Guerdon Industries

Notes: Please consider the client's great need for discretion. Must be delivered directly to Mr Guerdon himself. Letter permitting accompanied access to secure areas provided. To be shown at reception."

"Now, as you may or may not know, it's normally Adele that handles these kinds of jobs for me." Marion knew Adele was higher up in the pecking order than herself. She was good at her job. It wasn't surprising that she was trusted with more important tasks.

Marion nodded.

"And as you also may or may not know," Sammy continued, "she has, very inconveniently, suffered an injury that is preventing her from riding, at least in the near future." Hushed rumours said she had taken a beating, and that it was related to a delivery.

She nodded again.

"That's where you come in. You have proven reliable enough, and you're available. I want you to make the delivery. The pay will be more than you're used to, but because of the collateral on the goods I can only give you a 10% advance." He handed her a check. "I think you'll find it's sufficient." And it was, by a mile. It was more than she'd normally get for a whole week's work.

Another nod.

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"What's the matter girl? Cat got your tongue? Much for you, eh?" Marion cleared her throat.

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"No sir. No, I'll take the job."

Chapter 2 by Harlander



Something loomed out of the ever-present dust along the highway's edge. At the speed Marion was going, it grew from a faint blotch on the horizon in seconds. She slowed as it drew closer. It was a ramshackle building set among ruined shells.

It still had a front porch, though, and on that porch a man sat in a wooden chair, staring out over the desert. Every so often his head would twitch, jerking as if he'd been struck.

Marion knew the signs. Everyone did. An old soldier from the Reclamation Wars, his nervous system still tortured by the reflex implants that were never meant to last the whole length of the war, let alone a decade after.

She slowed to a stop, her bike's induction engine thudding as it bled excess energy. The vet's head turned to track her in the weird, mechanical motion they had. The weapon ports on his arms opened in a series of loud clicks.

Marion knew that the x-lasers and stub guns that once hid within would have been removed, but she flinched away all the same. After a moment, feeling more than a little sheepish, she spoke.

"Say, boss, you wouldn't happen to know where the Guerdon Industries facility is?"

The man laughed, his body shaking. His laugh was malevolent, and buzzed like a vocoder. It must have gone on for a minute. Marion stared, folding her arms and scowling. Damn wirejob vets always had such a weird sense of humour.

"You've gone right-" he twitched "- by the turn-off. Lemme guess-" twitch "-guess-" twitch "-guess, they told ya it's a huge building and ya can't miss it?"

Marion nodded.

Another minute of that ghastly laughter. "Sure, you can't. But y-y-y-y." The old soldier went into a full-on fit of muscle spasms for a moment. "The turn-off first. Go back about half a mile, it'll be on the right. It's high hidden, but you'll find it because you know it's there."

"Hey, thanks, dude," Marion said.

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"No problem. Now get outta here. You're triggering my threat analysis suite and it's giving me a damn headache."

Without further ado, Marion looped her bike about and headed back the way she'd come. Sure enough, half a mile later she spotted a strange glint at the side of the road. Slowing down, and bobbing her head from side to side, she realised what she was looking at.

A wide side road, big enough for two big rigs to drive side by side, was cut into the desert sands. Its material was the same colour as the surrounding ground, but smooth and flat. It was probably marked out by hidden radio transmitters to steer the automated transports the right way. She gunned her engine and turned along the road.

Chapter 3 by Grumpledorf



Marion drove down the road to the large gate made of pale white metal. A man in a booth made out of the metal waved her towards him. She went over and showed him the note. The man looked it over, glancing at her with intrigue. "Mmm. Ahem. Yes, well, you're clear to enter" He said leaning off his chair to enter some code into a keypad. As Marion walked back to her bike she heard the inner workings of heavy metal parts grinding against each other. Clangs and whirs coming from inside the white rainbow-shimmering walls slowly drew the gate open. There it was, Guerdon Industries in all it's glory.

Marion rode past the gates, the gate keeper watching her curiously the whole way. She parked her bike in one of the parking spaces. She didn't know where else to park it on such a formal delivery. She walked up to the structure, package in hand. The building was insanely tall, and of mediocre architectural design. It was basically a big silver cylinder. The door split open at her arrival. The inside was pristine and elegant, a stark contrast in design to the outside. Marion walked up to the front desk and handed the receptionist the letter. She read it with distaste in her eyes, like she was a cat perched on a window watching dumb humans walk by. "Go in the elevator, nine-hundredth floor" She said pointing to the wall. There was no elevator, just a little plaque that said *Lobby*. Marion nodded and walked over to see a thin circle embedded in the

ground in front of the plaque. She stepped in to see what was just say nine hundred. The secretary snapped. "In a moment."

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the hallway. They glowed slightly when she passed, as if offering to open if she got a bit closer. One door in particular had some ornate edges, she figured that might be Mr. Guerdon's office. The frosted glass pane of a door split open right down the middle, separating silently while still shining brightly for her.

The inside resembled nothing of an office, more of a lab where some hunk of machine was being built. No. Disassembled. Marion cautiously entered the room. The door closed and the package began vibrating. It became more violent and sporadic, trying to kick itself out of her hands. Other pieces of metal scattered around the room began to shiver as well. Suddenly parts from all around the room flew into the air, assembling themselves into complex workings. The complex machines would then place themselves into the larger device in the center of the room. The package Marion was now fighting against, pulled her towards it. Then it got hot. Really hot. The package burst into flames forcing her to let go. No hovering in the center of dancing machinery was an intricate cube with a bright glowing light in the center. The door behind her opened again. A man in a fine black suit stood at the door gasping "What have you done?" he shouted over clanging and buzzing of the automated assembly around them. The machine was getting bigger and almost complete. Finally the last piece snapped into place leaving a large black metal cube in the center of the room. She could still hear the parts moving inside until all the metal seams started melting away along with the sound. It was now silent. The cube slowly turned white. The same material as the gate before.

Marion now felt strange. Gravity instantly shifted. Towards the cube, and powerful. She hit the cube first, but instead of a hard metal surface like she was expecting, it was soft, light, and airy. What she imagined clouds felt like as a child. She sunk into the cube, her vision blurring, then fading to white.

Write a draft for chapter 4 of 8

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